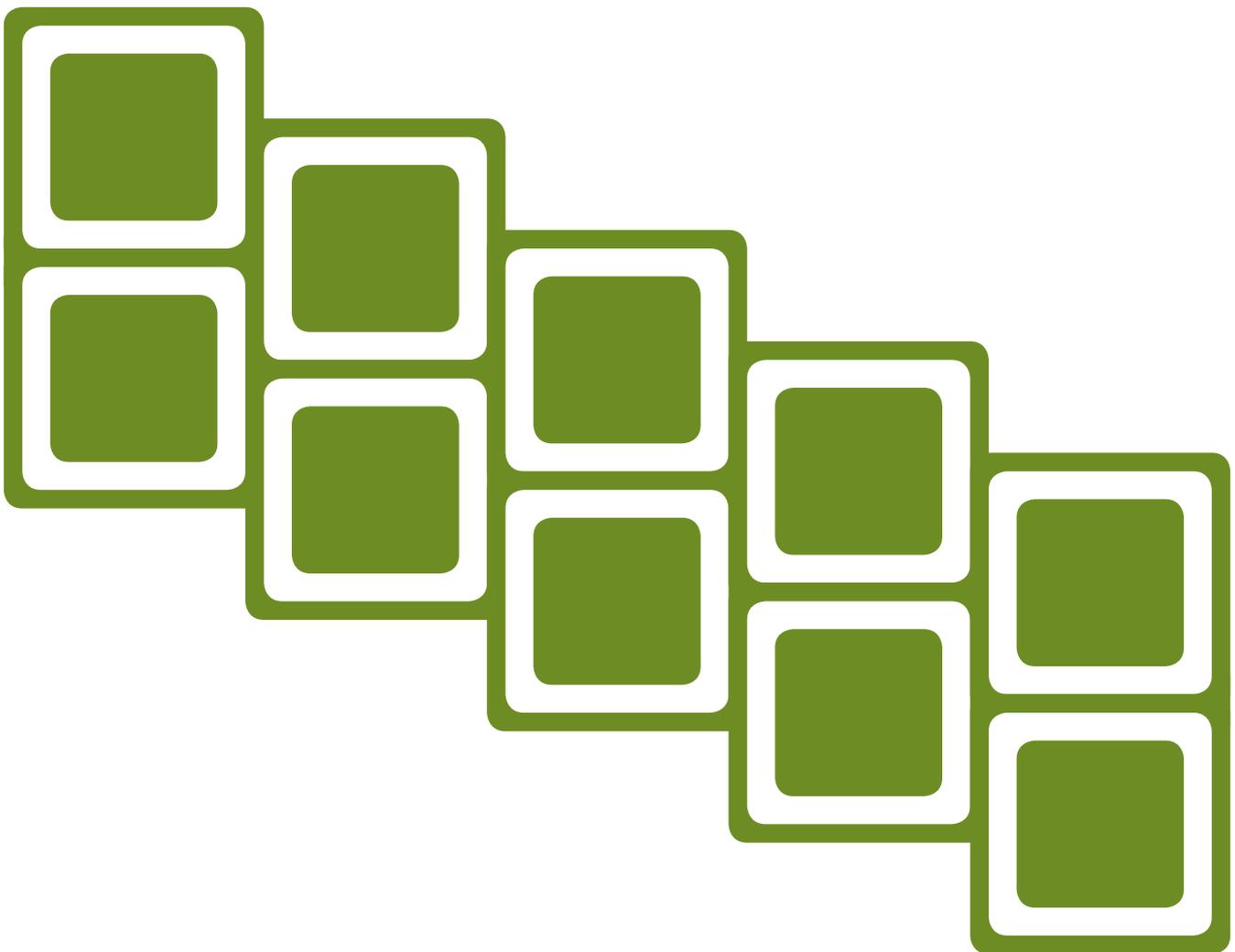


Summer Academe
Forum Papers

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Spotlight on Summer Session / Continuing Education: Own the Opportunity

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Summer session and continuing education have operated on the sidelines of higher education for decades and have frequently fallen outside the frame of the viewfinders of institutional leaders at the traditional core of colleges and universities. In spite of this, faculty and administrators in summer session programming and continuing education have attracted students annually by offering a variety of top-quality courses and programs designed around student needs (from degree completion to credential advancement). Although often not invited to participate in strategic discussions of the central leadership agenda, these units have taken care to maintain institutional alignment and advance strategic objectives. Summer session and continuing education have often been places where important experiments in pedagogy, experiential learning, career objectives, community engagement, and use of technology have occurred.

Times have changed. Flexible learning options and non-traditional students are forcing a new normal on higher education. The traditional students of our last century—the annual cohort of fresh-out-of-high-school graduates who enter four-year degree programs—have become only a segment of the population that requires higher education. We must change our model, address cost and access issues, and adapt to new demands.

The departments on our campuses that are most experienced and able to meet the needs of these “non-traditional” students are the summer session and continuing education divisions. More and more, presidents, provosts, chief financial officers, and others in senior positions on campus are realizing this and turning to our units for help. The staff and administrators in these areas know a lot about intensive course models, non-traditional term offerings, and use of technology for distance or blended course delivery; they also understand marketing, student recruitment, outcomes assessment, cash management, and academic business models. They are experienced in innovation, experimentation, and adoption of new systems, procedures, and expectations.

Leadership in these times demands confidence and the ability to act boldly and decisively. We often cannot wait for the rest of campus to catch up to us, as we step out with new program models and efforts to meet student needs. We are also under pressure to generate revenue and are well-suited to address this challenge as part of a new norm for our institutions. Piloting new, experimental forms of course delivery is a comfortable space for us but unknown to many others

on campus. We need to introduce different models and collaborate with other campus divisions to help lead the essential institutional transformations the 21st century demands of higher education.

Thrust into the occasional spotlight, summer session and continuing education leaders must be ready to speak with confidence to other campus leadership as well as to those who serve on our staff. Changing expectations and a more rapid decision-making framework demand readiness to respond and act. Waiting for instruction is not an option, since all campus leaders are facing challenges they have not experienced before, and there is pressure to respond with innovative solutions. In summer session and continuing education units we have been comfortable with innovation, experimentation, balancing budgets, and meeting the demands of faculty, students, and often parents and employers. Now we must use that experience and take up new challenges.

The rapid transitions created by information technology, the explosion of knowledge and access to it, and the dynamic shifts in learning, working, and living expectations of the 21st century are now on the doorstep of higher education. Summer session and continuing education leaders have an unprecedented opportunity to lead and participate in the transformation underway. We must be prepared for this new expectation. I urge faculty and administrators of the traditional core departments to collaborate with innovative colleagues in your departments and those on campus in summer session and continuing education. Encourage these innovators to think creatively and to work with your department in creating exciting new efforts. Gather the concepts, outcomes, possibilities, and big ideas together and promote these to senior leaders. Give your staff the confidence to achieve. Be ready to write, speak, and create visual presentations in concise and forward-thinking ways. Do not avoid or complain about the demands for volume, cash flow, and resource/talent sharing—embrace these challenges and own the new normal. Look forward; there is no other option.

Biography

Karen Sibley is the dean of the School of Professional Studies (SPS) and vice president for strategic initiatives at Brown University. Karen is focused on the development of multiple models of online learning, increasing the mid-career student population at Brown, and building institutional partnerships. She has degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, Brown University, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She is a past president of both NAASS and UPCEA.